

Notes from the Director

As the 2004 hurricane season approaches, most residents of Santa Rosa County need little reminder concerning the impact of such events; however, the Division of Emergency Management conducts public awareness sessions throughout the year that addresses not only hurricane preparedness as well as all other hazards to which the County may be exposed. Before I go on, I would like to recognize the sacrifices being made by our military personnel throughout the world. From those of us involved in the emergency services community and on behalf of all Santa Rosa residents, I wish them success in all of their endeavors, Godspeed and a safe return home.

This 2004 edition contains additional information pertaining to other disasters or emergencies; hence the name has been changed to the 2004 DISASTER GUIDE INCLUDING HURRICANES. Please take a few of your valuable moments and review the contents.

While hurricane preparedness and procedures is as always our focus, other forms of hazards to which the county may be exposed, commonly referred to as the "all-hazards approach" must also be considered. As an example, Santa Rosa County experiences damage caused by severe weather on a regular basis although on a much smaller scale than a hurricane.

Let us take a short look at some factors as hurricane season approaches. I realize my first item may sound strange, that is **KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE**. By that I mean, do you live in an Evacuation Zone based on predicted storm surge and

other factors? To help with this decision, an Evacuation Zone map is provided in this issue; for more information contact the Santa Rosa County Division of Emergency Management at the numbers provided. The location and type (mobile homes anywhere in the county) of your residence will determine if you will be told to evacuate as a hurricane approaches. If you do NOT live in an Evacuation Zone or mobile home, you should consider "sheltering-in-place" in your home. This requires certain preparation on your part, e.g. have your Hurricane Kit prepared (see list of items provided in this issue) and possibly reinforcing the structure as appropriate. If you choose to evacuate regardless of where you live, PLEASE LEAVE AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE and go to stay with friends or take a mini-vacation outside the affected region. Significant advances in the technology for forecasting hurricane paths provide ample warning to evacuate, take advantage of that by LEAVING EARLY! The American Red Cross Shelters and the County Health Department's Special Needs Shelter are provided as a last option in the event you are unable find another place to ride out the storm.

A critical facet of emergency management is that of keeping the public informed. To that end, our County Public Information Officer as well as the emergency management staff makes every effort to achieve that goal. In addition to the normal methods using the media, we actively meet with diverse groups and address all manner of issues. Several methods are available to inform the residents of Santa Rosa County in the

event of an emergency. For example, the Emergency Alert System (EAS) uses commercial radio and television stations in the event of impending severe weather. The EAS was recently expanded to become a component of the AMBER System that advises the public of abducted children. Florida was one of the first states to have a statewide AMBER program and it is being implemented nationwide.

Our Emergency Operations Center building is located at 4499 Pine Forest Road near Old Bagdad Highway. It has been recognized as an outstanding facility and is used as demonstration model for the emergency management community region-wide. It houses the Division of Emergency Management offices, the Office of the Public Information Officer/Media Center, the Emergency Communications Center where your 911 calls are answered (except for Gulf Breeze) and the actual EOC where functional representatives assemble during activations to assist in preparation, response and recovery in the event of a disaster. I would invite groups to tour this fine facility that can be scheduled by calling our office.

Recognizing that few things in life cannot be improved upon, the SRC Board of County Commissioners has formed an Emergency Services Advisory Committee (ESAC) to examine ways we can improve our emergency response capabilities throughout the County. Work is already underway to analyze and significant progress made resulting in improvements in many of our emergency programs.

The Santa Rosa County Division of Emergency Management staff has had the privilege to participate in an extremely timely and crucial effort. The Santa Rosa School District in coordination with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and numerous other agencies, initiated an effort designated CEO ROUND TABLE FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION which addresses not only violence prevention in our schools, but also any hazard to which our school children may be exposed. For further information, contact the School District representative at 983-5054.

In conclusion, I want every resident of Santa Rosa County to know that every effort is made to make myself and my staff available to discuss any Emergency Management related issue.

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